

# North Access Visitor Facilities Study

## Introduction

The 2001 Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill included the following directive for the National Park Service:

*Funds provided in fiscal year 2000 for design of a visitor center at Glacier Bay NP [National Park] shall be reprogrammed for a cooperative study with the State of Alaska to explore options for the location of campgrounds, trails, and other visitor facilities along the Stampede Road alignment.*

Senate Report 106-312, page 37

Construction of a new north access route to the interior of Denali National Park and Preserve has been a topic of consideration for a number of years. Generally, ideas for a new north access route suggest a 90-mile road or railroad that would begin at the George Parks Highway just north of Healy, follow or parallel the 1961 Stampede Road corridor that extends 56 miles to the Stampede airstrip, and continue from the Stampede airstrip to the Kantishna/Wonder Lake area. (Kantishna is the terminus of the existing park road.) The corridor corresponds to a historic corridor that originated at the historic railroad station of Lignite and ended at the mining settlement of Kantishna. The first portion of this corridor, approximately 30 miles, is located on state land, except for approximately one mile of the Stampede Road alignment that dips into the national park near the confluence of the Savage and Teklanika Rivers. The remaining portion of the route, approximately 60 miles, traverses land that became part of Denali National Park in 1980 with the passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). This Visitor Facilities Study explores options for the location of visitor facilities along this 90-mile corridor.

## Definition of the “Stampede Road Alignment”

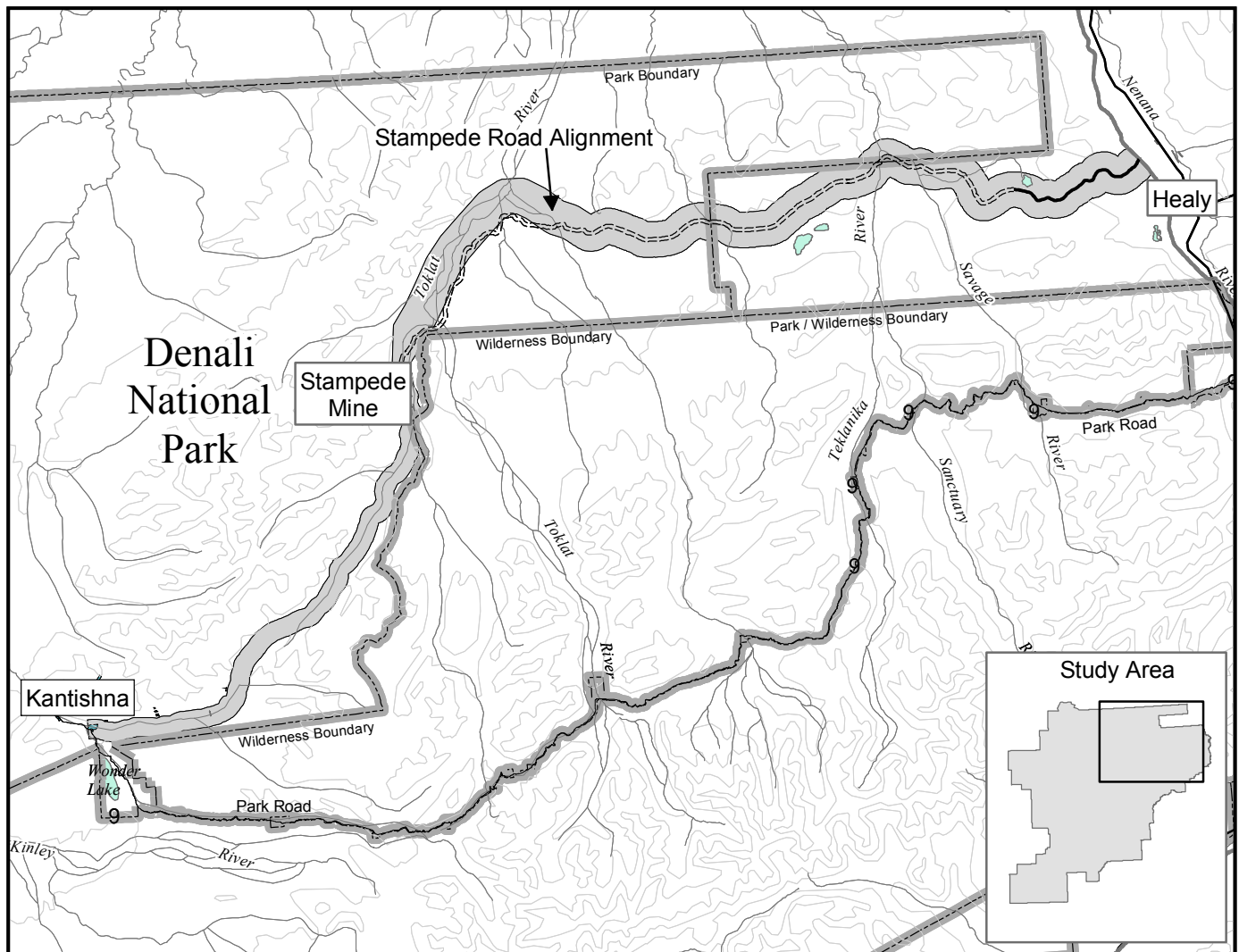
The Congressional direction for the visitor facilities study specified the “Stampede Road alignment.” For the purposes of this study, the “Stampede Road alignment” is defined as a corridor extending from the George Parks Highway north of Healy to Kantishna. This corridor includes the maintained portion of the Stampede Road (approximately eight miles) and the remnants of the road constructed in 1961 to access the Stampede Mine. Beyond the Stampede airstrip, the corridor generally includes the Clearwater Fork Valley, tributary valleys connecting the Clearwater and Moose Creeks, and the Moose Creek Valley downstream to Kantishna. This definition of the “Stampede Road alignment” is consistent with the 1993 *Alternative Transportation Modes Feasibility Study* as depicted and labeled on several of the document’s maps and the 1997 *North Access Feasibility Study*.

The definition of the “Stampede Road alignment” meets the intent of the Congressional direction of the study; it is not meant to suggest that a road either currently or historically existed over the length of the 90-mile corridor. Technically, the Stampede Road alignment does not extend past the Stampede airstrip, the termination of the 56-mile pioneer road constructed in 1961 to access

the Stampede Mine. Upon its completion, the 56-mile road received no maintenance and degraded rapidly. Today, approximately eight miles of the Stampede Road is maintained. The first four miles were chip-sealed in 2001 and the remaining portion is gravel.

There is strong public sentiment against using the term “Stampede Road alignment” because it perpetuates a misconception that an actual road exists between Healy and Kantishna. To remain consistent with the Congressional direction for this study, however, the term “Stampede Road alignment” will be used throughout this document.

## Study Area Map



*Map of the Stampede Road alignment as defined for the purposes of this study.*

---

**Purpose of the Visitor Facilities Study**

---

The purpose and unique challenge of the Visitor Facilities Study is to “explore options for the location of campgrounds, trails, and other visitor facilities” along a “road alignment” where no road exists, except for the first eight miles of the Stampede Road. In essence, this study explores locations for visitor facilities where there is currently no vehicle transportation corridor, road or railroad, to facilitate access to any location or visitor facility between Eight Mile Lake (the end of the maintained portion of the Stampede Road) and the Kantishna/Wonder Lake area.

This study reviews the Stampede Road alignment, considers appropriate types of and distances between visitor facilities along a 90-mile corridor, identifies soils types, explores opportunities for natural and cultural interpretation along the corridor, and discusses land status. This study also includes information on the natural and cultural environment of the study area. A summary of the public involvement process and comments received is provided in appendix A.

Identifying optional route locations for a new road or railroad between Healy and the Kantishna/Wonder Lake area would require extensive research and an in-depth environmental analysis, and it is outside the scope of this study. As such, this study is confined to considering locations for visitor facilities along the 90-mile Stampede Road alignment.